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Environmental performance reviews

Role of Environmental Performance Reviews in supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region

Note by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews

Summary

Acknowledging the important contribution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Performance Review Programme over the past 20 years as an effective and practical policy tool, at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016), ministers and heads of delegation highlighted the role that the Programme could play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 9).

The Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, with support from the secretariat, prepared the present document for consideration of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy. At its twenty-second session in January 2017, the Committee approved an earlier version of this document and requested the secretariat to process it in its final edited version for the next session of the Committee (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 55).

The present document will guide the process of addressing relevant Sustainable Development Goals in ECE environmental performance reviews.

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I. Introduction

1. Acknowledging the important contribution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environmental Performance Review Programme over the past 20 years as an effective and practical policy tool, at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2016), ministers and heads of delegation highlighted the role that the Programme could play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region (ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 9).

2. The Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, with support from the secretariat, prepared the present document for the consideration of the Committee on Environmental Policy. At its twenty-second session in January 2017, the Committee approved an earlier version of the document and requested the secretariat to process it in its final edited version for the Committee's next session (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 55).

3. The present document will guide the process of addressing relevant Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE environmental performance reviews.

4. Eligible countries are encouraged to benefit from using the Environmental Performance Review Programme in support of their efforts towards the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Third cycle reviews

5. At the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference held in Astana in 2011, ministers and heads of delegation invited ECE to conduct a third cycle of environmental performance reviews for eligible ECE member countries. The Ministerial Declaration adopted in Astana identified three blocks of issues that could be addressed in the third cycle reviews: (a) environmental governance and financing in a green economy context; (b) countries' cooperation with the international community; and (c) environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 13).

6. In the period from 2012 to early 2017, the third cycle methodology was applied to the third cycle reviews of the Republic of Moldova (2013), Montenegro (2014), Serbia (2014), Georgia (2015), Belarus (2015), Tajikistan (2017) and Bulgaria (2017).¹ It was also applied to the second cycle review of Croatia (2013) and the review of Morocco (2013). At the time of the Batumi Ministerial Conference in 2016 the third cycle was approaching its midpoint.

A. Structure

7. In 2013 the Committee on Environmental Policy supported the detailed structure of third cycle reviews proposed by the secretariat, agreeing to revisit it in the light of experience gained in its practical application (ECE/CEP/2013/2, para. 34). The detailed structure of third cycle reviews, as set out in document ECE/CEP/2013/12, includes:

15. *Introduction: Environmental overview.* This will provide a succinct synopsis of the socioeconomic context and major developments (in terms of environmental

¹ All dates refer to the years of adoption of the review recommendations by the Committee on Environmental Policy.

pressures and natural resource use) in key environmental areas (such as air, climate change, water, waste, land, soil and biodiversity).

16. *Part I: Environmental governance and financing in a green economy context.* Major issues to be covered are:

(a) The legal and policymaking framework and its implementation, including specific green economy initiatives such as energy efficiency, renewables, low carbon mobility, increased resource efficiency, including energy and water use efficiency, green jobs and eco-innovation;

(b) Regulatory instruments and their enforcement;

(c) Economic instruments and environmental expenditures, including investments in innovative green technologies;

(d) Environmental monitoring, information and education.

17. *Part II: Domestic-international interface.* This part focuses on:

(a) The implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and commitments, bilateral cooperation and international technical assistance on environment and sustainable development;

(b) Policies and measures to address climate change adaptation and mitigation.

18. *Part III: Integration of environmental considerations with economic sector policies and selected environmental sector issues.* This part covers environmental issues, including green technology issues, in selected socioeconomic sectors such as industry, energy, transport, agriculture, forestry, health and housing, but also in water resources management, air protection, waste management, biodiversity and nature protection. Up to four sectors and areas in total will be selected for each Environmental Performance Review in consultation with the country under review.

B. Experience with applying the third cycle review structure

8. The third cycle review structure has in general been welcomed by countries and allowed for covering the three blocks of issues outlined by the Astana Ministerial Declaration. However, the experience showed that most countries under review preferred to familiarize themselves with the detailed terms of reference for all possible review chapters and to hold extensive internal consultations on the structure of their environmental performance review report prior to hosting the preparatory mission or during such a mission.

9. The established review structure was followed for the third cycle reviews of Bulgaria, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia. Georgia, however, preferred a slightly different structure, which was also favoured by Belarus and Tajikistan: (a) the issues of monitoring, international cooperation and climate change were integrated into other chapters of the review rather than being stand-alone chapters; (b) part II was fully devoted to media and pollution management issues, covering in separate chapters the topics of air protection, water management, waste management, biodiversity and protected areas; (c) a number of sectors were covered in part III devoted to interaction of the environment with selected sectors or issues. Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan highly valued the opportunity to address the mainstreaming of environmental considerations into a large number of sectoral policies through the reviews and appreciated the prospect of strengthening cooperation with sectoral ministries during the review process. In addition, tackling more sectors in their environmental performance reviews helped to raise the profile

of the exercise and the resulting recommendations at the governmental level: for example, the launch of the third Environmental Performance Review of Belarus was attended by the country's Prime Minister, and the country adopted at the level of the Vice Prime Minister a cross-sectoral action plan to implement the review recommendations.

10. Therefore, it appeared to be important to maintain a certain flexibility when discussing the structure of environmental performance review reports on the basis of the detailed structure set in document ECE/CEP/2013/12. The secretariat ensured that the three blocks of issues identified in the Astana Ministerial Declaration for the third cycle were prominently reflected in every review, irrespective of the exact structure negotiated with the country through adjustments made to the terms of reference of individual chapters.

11. Regarding the content, a challenging task has been to devote adequate attention in third cycle reviews to environmental governance and financing in a green economy context and to specific green economy initiatives. The reviews addressed green economy aspects both in various chapters (e.g., on the legal and policy framework, or energy and environment) and in a dedicated chapter on economic instruments and environmental expenditure. However, in many countries the lack of a legal and policy framework for green economy was observed, together with a shortage of specific green economy initiatives, except for few green economy projects supported by international donors. It was also a challenge to cover the investments in greening the economy separately from the general environmental expenditures, as no such information is separately collected in the countries. Therefore, the reviews tended to emphasize the need for a clear policy framework and formalized institutional responsibilities and/or coordination mechanisms on green economy, rather than describe such frameworks and mechanisms. In some countries that have gone through a third cycle review, the policy framework on green economy has since been enhanced: for example, Belarus has developed a national action plan to introduce green economy principles for the period until 2020.

12. No difficulties were encountered in covering in detail the other two blocks of issues identified in the Astana Ministerial Declaration — i.e., countries' cooperation with the international community and environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors.

13. All third cycle reviews but one included the evaluation of the country's implementation of the recommendations from the second reviews. These evaluations were prepared by the review team on the basis of information provided by the countries under review, and clearly indicate for each recommendation whether they were implemented, not implemented or only partially implemented. Such an evaluation was not done for Bulgaria because of changes in the political situation in the country and the lengthy period (16 years) between its second and third reviews.

14. All third cycle reviews continued to include annexes with information on key data and indicators, participation in multilateral environmental agreements and major environment-related legislation. In addition, the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia and Tajikistan included annexes on Millennium Development Goals indicators. Moreover, the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan also included annexes on the results of the For Future Inland Transport Systems (ForFITS) tool applied to support the analysis in the chapters on transport and the environment.

III. Supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region

A. Role and scope

15. In line with the outcomes of the Batumi Ministerial Conference, and building on the experience with assisting countries in the achievement and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals, environmental performance reviews can assist countries in the achievement and monitoring of relevant Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, they can:

- (a) Assist in adapting the relevant Sustainable Development Goals to the national context in the countries under review;
- (b) Assess the progress a country under review is making in achieving relevant Goals, identify challenges and provide recommendations to address them;
- (c) Identify systemic problems and cross-cutting issues related to the achievement of relevant Goals;
- (d) Contribute to the sharing of experience among countries on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

16. Environmental performance reviews do not cover the whole range of issues addressed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). They can support the achievement and monitoring of those Goals and/or targets from the 2030 Agenda that are relevant for the particular review content requested by the country under review (relevant Goals and/or targets). These relevant Goals and/or targets would differ from review to review depending on the thematic structure of the review report agreed with the country under review. For example, when the country has requested a chapter on water management, Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) would be considered as relevant. In many cases, only one or more targets within a Sustainable Development Goal would be considered relevant rather than the entire Goal.

17. In the majority of cases, the relevant Goals and/or targets would be environment-related; however this would not always be the case. The environmental dimension of some Sustainable Development Goals and targets may be not very pronounced, but may be important for sectoral chapters of a given review, in particular in the light of the integrated and indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, which balance the three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental. For example, Goal 5 (gender equality) and its target 5.a² can be relevant for the review of a country that has requested a chapter on land management or a chapter on agriculture and environment and that is facing gender imbalances in access to land ownership.

18. The related recommendations provided in environmental performance review reports should aim to support the achievement of relevant Goals and/or targets by a country under review. Such recommendations can provide advice, for example, on the need to improve legislation and its enforcement or on additional and/or alternative measures to support the achievement of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and/or targets.

² “Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.”

B. Contribution to the follow-up and review at the national and regional levels

19. By assisting countries under review in monitoring progress towards the relevant Goals and/or targets and in achieving them through the provision of recommendations, environmental performance reviews can contribute to the country-driven follow-up and review of progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. In particular, they can serve as a building block, i.e., one of many inputs, to national reviews when such reviews are prepared by the countries in cooperation with the United Nations country teams. At the same time, they can also serve as inputs to the voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Ultimately, the environmental performance reviews can provide input to the regional follow-up and review mechanism.

C. Practical ways of incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals in environmental performance reviews

Possible options

20. There are various ways that relevant Goals and/or targets can be incorporated into the contents of an environmental performance review report. The one-size-fits-all approach is to be avoided and some flexibility is needed to ensure that such incorporation best responds to the needs of the country under review. The options outlined below will serve as a starting point for discussion during consultations with countries on the structure of a future environmental performance review report.

Option 1: Including the review of relevant Goals and/or targets in the contents of the chapters of the environmental performance review report

21. Building on the experience with the Millennium Development Goals, the most straightforward way to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals in the environmental performance reviews would be to include the review of relevant Goals and/or targets in the contents of the chapters of the report agreed with the country under review and to address the interlinkages and cross-cutting issues in chapters covering horizontal issues (e.g., the chapters on the legal and policy framework or on economic instruments for greening the economy).

22. A detailed target-specific mapping of relevant Goals and/or targets vis-à-vis the chapters of an environmental performance review report would need to be undertaken for every review and be adjusted to the structure of the review report. As some targets could potentially be addressed by more than one chapter, the review-specific mapping would also make it possible to avoid duplication.

23. In the short-term, the reviews of relevant Goals and/or targets in the chapters of the report could focus on the existence of an enabling framework for achieving the Goal and/or target, while at a later stage the reviews could move towards an assessment of progress towards achievement of the Goal and/or target and provision of recommendations on how to foster progress.

24. The reviews of relevant goals and/or targets in the chapters of the report can be in the form of a box or a section.

25. It is important that the reviews of relevant Goals and/or targets in the chapters of the report serve to complement the overall analysis of the topic of the chapter, but do not hijack the content of the whole chapter.

Option 2: Chapter on the assessment of progress towards achieving relevant Goals and/or targets

26. A second way to incorporate the Goals would be to either: (a) introduce a comprehensive chapter on the assessment of progress that a country has made towards achieving relevant Sustainable Development Goals and/or targets; or (b) extend the chapter on the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and commitments to include a part on relevant Goals and/or targets.

27. Such a chapter or part could provide a detailed coverage of all the relevant Goals and/or targets in one place, together with the analysis of the interlinkages and cross-cutting issues. Such a chapter or part could address:

- (a) The overall framework in support of implementation of the relevant Goals and/or targets, including:
 - (i) The legal and policy framework;
 - (ii) The institutional framework, including coordination mechanisms and stakeholder participation;
 - (iii) Information and data;
 - (iv) Resources and other means of implementation;
- (b) Assessment of the relevant Goals and/or targets (one by one or in a clustered assessment), including:
 - (i) Adapting the Goals to the national context;
 - (ii) Progress made and remaining challenges;
 - (c) Cross-cutting issues in the achievement of the relevant Goals and/or targets;
 - (d) Conclusions and recommendations.

Option 3: Integrating relevant Goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters and covering in an additional chapter the Sustainable Development Goals and/or targets not addressed by other chapters but requested by the country under review

28. Another option would be to integrate relevant Goals and/or targets into the contents of the chapters of the review report and cover in an additional chapter those Goals and/or targets that were not addressed by other chapters but which were requested by the country under review. This would allow broader coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals in cases where the structure of the report includes a limited number of subjects or sectoral issues. For example, for an environmental performance review that follows the third cycle review structure and includes in part III only the chapter on water management, option 3 would allow for: (a) integrating Goal 6 in the chapter on water management; and (b) covering a broader range of Goals and/or targets requested by the country in a separate chapter, together with the analysis of the interlinkages and cross-cutting issues.

Option 4: Providing a general review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the chapter on the legal and policy framework and including the review of relevant Goals and/or targets in the contents of the other chapters

29. Under option 4, a general review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals would be provided in the chapter on the legal and policy framework, whereas the review of relevant Goals and/or targets would be included in other chapters of the report. The general review would address, for example, such aspects as the existence of a national sustainable development strategy, its update or alignment with the

Sustainable Development Goals, the process of implementation, the availability and effectiveness of monitoring mechanisms, etc. The review of relevant Goals and/or targets in other chapters of the report would be similar to the one proposed under option 1 and could be done in the form of a box or a section within respective chapters.

Annex

30. At a later stage, an annex with Sustainable Development Goal indicators can be added to complement the substantive analyses in the report, as was done with Millennium Development Goal indicators in the third cycle reviews of Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia and Tajikistan. Such an annex could complement any of the above-mentioned options.

D. Guidance

31. In line with its mandate to provide guidance to the ECE secretariat and the Committee on Environmental Policy on all substantive and organizational matters arising in the implementation of the Environmental Performance Review Programme (see ECE/CEP/2014/13, annex), the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews will provide guidance on opportunities for improving the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals into the reviews.

32. The secretariat will provide guidance to the review teams with regard to the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals into environmental performance reviews.

IV. Data and resource requirements

A. Data and information

33. The availability of high-quality, reliable and timely data in countries under review may represent a serious challenge. The environmental performance review process relies mostly on the collaboration with national authorities to obtain the necessary data for the report. The main sources of review data include national statistical offices, national environmental authorities and other relevant bodies in the country under review, as well as international organizations.

34. Incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the reviews would require efforts from the country under review to provide additional data and information on relevant Goals and/or targets. It would also require efforts from the review teams to access and analyse such data and information.

35. In addition to national sources, a number of mechanisms and tools can enhance information and data support for incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the environmental performance reviews. These include, among others, the national reporting processes under various multilateral environmental agreements, a number of global processes and instruments — including the UNEP Live platform, its Indicator Reporting Information System and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Outlook process — and several ECE review mechanisms and processes besides the environmental performance reviews (see ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/INF/5).

B. Resource requirements

Operational budget

36. While the core secretariat for the Environmental Performance Review Programme is provided by the ECE regular budget, the operational budget for the Programme will continue to depend on extrabudgetary funds provided by donors directly to the Environmental Performance Review trust fund or through contributions in kind, mostly in the form of experts provided by countries and international organizations and institutions like the European Environment Agency, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, UNEP, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe. In recent years, in addition to the Environment Division, some other ECE divisions have also provided staff to the review teams.

37. The extrabudgetary funding requirements for the review of a country range between \$100,000 and \$250,000, depending on a number of factors, such as mission costs, the number of chapters, the availability of experts provided by countries and international organizations and fluctuations in currency exchange rates. These cost requirements cover the preparatory mission, the review mission, consultancies, editing of the English language version of the report, participation in the meetings of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and the relevant sessions of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the translation of the report into Russian or local languages and the launch event.

38. Incorporating a focus on relevant Sustainable Development Goals in the reviews may require additional expertise on the review teams. For this, the current engagement between the Environmental Performance Review Programme and partner organizations needs to be strengthened, collaboration with new partners needs to be developed and cooperation with other ECE divisions needs to be enhanced. It would also require securing the availability of expertise in case the review contains an additional comprehensive chapter on the assessment of progress towards achieving relevant Goals and/or targets (as provided for under options 2 and 3) and such a chapter is not prepared by an expert provided in-kind by a country or an international organization.

National level

39. The third cycle reviews already involve a wide range of national authorities beyond the environmental authorities. For example, during the review mission, the review team for the third Environmental Performance Review of Belarus met representatives of over 50 governmental authorities, institutions and organizations that were not attached to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection. However, in some countries under review incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into reviews may require additional efforts to enhance participation in the review of governmental institutions other than the national environmental authorities.

Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews

40. The membership of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, which carries out the expert review process, consists of 10 to 14 participants nominated by ECE member States. Members of the Expert Group have diverse experience so that, together, they can provide the necessary substantive input and comments covering all the topics in the various chapters and recommendations of the review report. According to the terms of reference of the Group, additional experts nominated by the delegates of the Committee on Environmental Policy and agreed by the members of the Expert Group, in consultation with the secretariat, and international institutions invited by the secretariat may participate in the meetings of the Expert Group (see ECE/CEP/2014/13, annex).

41. The opportunity of inviting additional experts from Governments and international organizations to participate in meetings of the Expert Group is used rather often, especially for lengthy reports and reports covering specific sectors. Some ECE member States nominated alternate members to the Expert Group with a view to adapting participation to the contents of the report under review.

42. Incorporating a focus on Sustainable Development Goals in environmental performance reviews may require enhancing the current practice of inviting additional experts from Governments and international organizations to participate in the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews. In turn, incorporating Sustainable Development Goals in the reviews may raise the interest of Governments not participating in the Expert Group to become involved in its activities.
